

NAME: Murakami, Kumajiro DATE OF BIRTH: 1881 PLACE OF BIRTH: Yamaguchi
Age: 94 Sex: M Marital Status: _____ Education: 4 years

PRE-WAR:

Date of arrival in U.S.: 1898 Age: 17 M.S. S Port of entry: Hawaii
Occupation/s: 1. Student/Sugar Cane worker 2. Farmer 3. _____
Place of residence: 1. Hawaii (3 years) 2. Watsonville, Ca. 3. _____
Religious affiliation: _____
Community organizations/activities: _____

EVACUATION:

Name of assembly center: Salinas Assembly Center
Name of relocation center: Poston, Arizona W.R.A. Center
Dispensation of property: _____ Names of bank/s: _____
Jobs held in camp: 1. Kitchen Helper 2. _____
Jobs held outside of camp: _____
Left camp to go to: Chicago, Illinois

POST-WAR:

Date returned to West Coast: ?
Address/es: 1. Chicago, Illinois (6 mos) 2. Watsonville, California
3. _____
Religious affiliation: Buddhist
Activities: 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____
If deceased, date, place and age at time of death: _____

Name of interviewer: Rev. Heihachiro Takaraba Date: 2/7/75 Place: Watsonville, Ca.

Translator: Yasuko Akamatsu

NAME: KUMAJIRO MURAKAMI

AGE: 94

DATE OF BIRTH: Ken: 1881

PLACE OF Birth: Yamaguchi Ken --

YEAR OF ENTRY INTO THE USA: 1898, 17 years old

MAJOR OCCUPATION: Farmer

CAMP: Poston

DATE OF INTERVIEW: Feb. 7, 1975

PLACE OF INTERVIEW: Watsonville, California

INTERVIEWER: Heihachiro Takarabe

TRANSLATOR: Yasuka Akamatsu

Mrs. Kumajiro Murakami, Watsonville, Calif.

Age 94

Interviewed by Rev. H. Takarabe on 2-7-75

Rev. T., "The reason we are interviewing Isseis is that we want to hear your life story, translate them into English so that Sanseis and Yonseis can read them."

Q: What is your name?

A: My name is Kumajiro Murakami.

Q: Where were you born?

A: In Yamaguchi-Ken, Japan.

Q: When were you born?

A: In 1881.

Q: How old are you now?

A: I will be 94 in March 1975.

Q: What was your father like? Was he strict?

A: My father was not strict.

Q: Was your mother strict?

A: No, she was not. My father drank quite heavily and he died rather young. His work was hard too. In those days, farmers inhaled alot of dust while trashing rice. My father developed

pneumonia. My grandfather lived until he was 94 years old.

Q: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

A: There were seven of us.

Q: Where were you from the eldest?

A: There were five boys and two girls. I was the fourth from the eldest. My brothers and sisters have all passed away. Some died during the last war. Some were house building carpenters and some were ship building carpenters. They were in Tokyo during the war and got killed by the bombing. One lived in Taiwan (Formosa) and died in an accident while working at a sugar factory. My elder brother owned a hotel. He and his wife went to a show one night, when it started to rain, he ran home and died soon after he reached home from a heart attack. He was still in his twenties. He went to live in a city because he did not like farming.

Q: Did you attend school in Japan?

A: I only went four years because I had ear trouble from swimming alot. We lived near the sea. About that time, many Japanese started to come to Hawaii. I was among that group.

Q: Did you go to sea alot?

A: Yes, I did.

Q: Did you go fishing?

A: I didn't do much fishing but I played in the water. My ear trouble started from lot of diving. I came to Hawaii and became very ill with a high fever. I got some kind of an infection. I was treated by doctors and got well. The fever might have killed the bacterias. I never had ear trouble since.

Q: Did you like to go to school? Do you remember your school days?

A: Yes, I remember some things.

Q: What do you remember?

A: It was a long time ago and the elementary schools were four years. I memorized arithmetic by poems. I liked it and I was good at it. I liked to go to school.

Q: Was your teachers kind?

A: Yes, they were.

Q: What did you enjoy most while you were in Japan?

A: In the summer, I liked to play with boats in the water. And in the winter, I enjoyed going to the mountains to chop wood and build bon-fires. One brother was a boat carpenter and one was a house carpenter.

Q: Your father was a farmer. Was he good at carpenter work?

A: He had many children. Some helped the farm and some were carpenters.

Q: Do you remember of any war while you were in Japan?

A: Yes. I was 15 years old when war broke out with China. I wrote a letter to the government asking them to let me go as a soldier but was refused because I was too young. The war ended after I came to Hawaii.

Q: Where were you when the Russian-Japanese War broke out?

A: I was over here.

Q: When did you leave Japan?

A: I think it was in Meiji 31 (1898).

Q: Is it 1898 here?

A: I think it was.

Q: How old were you?

A: I think I was about 17 years old.

Q: What did you do until you came to Hawaii?

A: Helped on the farm and attended school too. Sometimes, I played on the way to school and ate my lunch at the blacksmith's place. Sometimes, I went by the beach and played there.

Q: What did you do in Hawaii?

A: I worked in the sugar cane field. For about 3 years, 22 of us had a contract with a sugar refining company to grow sugar cane. We did not have enough rain in those years and the crop

was bad. We made just enough for room and board. I decided it wasn't worth staying there so I wrote to a hotel in Honolulu to find out if I could come to Mainland America. The reply was that I could so I went to Honolulu by myself, stayed there few days and came to America.

Q: How long did you stay in Hawaii?

A: I stayed about three years.

Q: On the steamship to Hawaii from Japan, were all the passengers headed for Hawaii?

A: There were other foreigners on the ship, too. It was an American steamship named "Sonoma." I think it took one week from Hawaii to Mainland America.

Q: How long did it take from Japan to Hawaii?

A: It took over 10 days.

Q: Did anything happen on the ship?

A: No, nothing happened. They used coal in those days. I helped move the coal to the boiler room because it was more fun than doing nothing on the ship. When I landed in Hawaii and while I was waiting for transportation to a small island, I caught typhoid fever. It took about 12 hours to the other island. As soon as I got there, I entered the company hospital because I was very sick with high fever and dysentery. Many other Japanese were there and every day about three persons died from the disease.

There was a very kind nurse. She fed me with cooked rice liquid. I was one of the fortunate ones. I got well and my ear got well, too. I went through many hardships.

Q: What kind of hardships did you go through?

A: In Hawaii, it wasn't too hard. We had a contract with a sugar refinery and we were on our own. Some laborers had a watchman on a horse--one watchman to about 20 men. If anyone was slow, the watchman used a whip on him. One of my friends got angry after he was whipped. He fought with the watchman (white man) and was put in jail for about a week. We took food to him every day.

Q: What time did you start work in the morning?

A: We started at 6 A.M. and worked til 4 P.M.

Q: Were there something interesting in Hawaii?

A: I guess it was horse racing. I owned a horse myself. I raised him from a pony and I rode to work on him. One day, we decided to race my horse with a Portuguese man's horse. We went to other horse races and made bets, too. There were some fun but there were dangers, too.

Q: What kind of dangers?

A: I suffered a disease with high fever, fell from the horse, and etc.

Q: When you came to America, where did you settle?

A: I came to San Francisco on the steamship "Sonoma." It took one week then.

Q: Where did you go from San Francisco?

A: I came to Watsonville because I had relatives here.

Q: What did you do after you arrived here?

A: I went to work on my relative's strawberry farm. My sister-in-law's brother operated the ranch. He was in the reserve in the Japanese Army and had to return to Japan to fight a war. I think it was the Japanese-Russian War. My older brother from Japan came to operate the farm.

Q: Did Japan call on reserves who were here in this country?

A: Yes, they did. I remember sending him off at Palo Alto station with a Japanese flag in my hand.

Q: Were you able to wave Japanese flags?

A: Yes, in those days we could.

Q: Was the work very hard?

A: Some work was hard--such as sugar beet work. Picking up potatoes wasn't easy but I don't think it was that hard.

Q: You came to Watsonville and didn't you move to any where else?

A: I was in Sur near the sea just south of Monterey for a while.

There was a place where lime was dug out. I worked there. We transported the lime in a wagon from the hillside and transferred the big barrels to a boat which took the lime elsewhere. There were about 30 Japanese men working there and I cooked for them. I remember there was a whole side of beef hanging from a ceiling which I took pieces of meat to use. Some men worked on road construction. I remember hearing dynamite blasts when they were breaking rocks.

Q: How long did you stay there?

A: I think I was there about half a year.

Q: Where did you go from there?

A: I came back to Watsonville to grow strawberries.

Q: Did you buy a farm?

A: Yes, I operated a farm.

Q: When did you get married?

A: I got married in 1909.

Q: How did you get married?

A: My mother in Japan selected the bride.

Q: Did you know her before?

A: I knew her when she was a little girl.

Q: Were you happy when you got married?

A: I think I was.

Q: Was she in Watsonville?

A: Yes, I went to meet her in San Francisco when she arrived and brought her to Watsonville.

Q: When did you have children?

A: In a few years.

Q: Did you say your child was taken to Japan?

A: Yes, he was taken over there to study but returned to United States in couple of years. He was the eldest and died rather young.

Q: Did you succeed in strawberry farming?

A: It wasn't too bad.

Q: How big did you farm?

A: One patch was 21 acres and another was 20 acres. Strawberry plants are good for three years.

Q: Do you keep on planting?

A: It's not good to plant in the same place continuously. We alternate places to plant. Lettuce grew very well where old strawberry plants were pulled out.

Q: How many children did you have?

A: I had two boys (sons) and three girls (daughters).

Q: Did you say one son died early?

A: Yes. The other son lives here.

Q: How did you do during the Depression?

A: I didn't feel it too much because everything was cheaper then. In 1915, I got a place which was 50 acres and there were lot of tall trees on it. I had the trees removed with powder. I had around 10 men working for me then. They used horses to remove the stumps. I grew more strawberries that year thinking I would make money because of the "World Fair." I was disappointed because people did not buy that much. It was a five partner enterprise and we lost money. We broke up partnership. I started a small farm again and gradually regained my loss.

Q: During the 1933 Depression, what did you do?

A: I did alright then.

Q: When was the Buddhist Church here built?

A: It was after I came here.

Q: Were you friendly with the caucasians?

A: I leased 50 acres from a caucasian and operated a farm near the airport. This was just before WWII. I had a house, several working men's quarters, barn, tool shed and etcs., total of 11 buildings. I left everthing when we evacuated. Some mean people pointed guns at us after the war broke out. I had strawberries

near the ocean, too. The army built fences all along there.

Q: How did you feel when Pearl Harbor was attacked by the Japanese?

A: I was shocked.

Q: Did you think the Japanese were in danger?

A: Yes, I did. I thought the Japanese in Hawaii would be killed.

Q: Did you think you were in danger?

A: I didn't think we were because we were not in Hawaii.

Q: Did you think the United States government would do something?

A: I didn't think so but someone shot a gun from the road.

Q: Did you go to an Assembly Center?

A: We went to Salinas Assembly Center and then to Poston, Arizona WRA Center. We used lot of fertilizer and had some very nice strawberries growing that spring. We had to leave everthing and it was a big loss. I had quite a few people working for me too.

Q: How did you feel when you entered the Assembly Center?

A: There were so many of us in the same situation, we couldn't grieve. It wasn't very nice.

Q: How was the food?

A: Food was alright. We had enough.

Q: Were there any unpleasant incidents?

A: I didn't think so. We weren't lonesome because there were so many of us. There were inconveniences. The toilets were bad. I'll never forget. We had no right to complain.

Q: Did you line up to go to mess halls?

A: Yes, we did. It was better in the Relocation Center.

Q: How was it in Poston?

A: It was better. We had lot of water, had swimming pool and etcs. The weather was very hot--around 102 degrees.

Q: Did you work in the center?

A: I helped the cook. In between our work, we picked up nails (which was dropped by the carpenters when building barracks) from the sand and built an entertainment stand from scraps of lumber.

Q: What was your hobby?

A: I carved birds from wood. And I was a good rice cooker.

Q: Were you about 60 years old when you entered the camp?

A: Yes. I didn't have to work too hard.

Q: Did you do any "Shigin" (Japanese peoptry singing)?

A: Yes, I did. I have done this about 20 years.

Q: Did you do any "Go" or "Shōgi" (Japanese chess game)?

A: No, I didn't. I had a set but I gave it away.

Q: Did you sign the "Loyalty" questionnaire?

A: It was for the Niseis. I didn't have to do it.

Q: What did you think of Niseis being put in camps?

A: It wasn't good but I thought it couldn't be helped. Many Niseis went into the U.S. Army from camp and were sent overseas. My eldest son wasn't taken because he had skin trouble. He died in Chicago. The other went into service.

Q: Did you think it was alright for Niseis to go into the army?

A: Yes, I thought so. After the war was over, I couldn't farm by myself. I made an appeal to have my son discharged.

Q: When did you leave the relocation center?

A: ?

Q: Did you return directly to California?

A: No, we were in Chicago about 6 months.

Q: Did you lose your son then?

A: No, he died after that. He remained in Chicago and worked as a bartender.

Q: Did you work in Chicago?

A: No, I stayed home and watched my grandchild. My wife and others went to work.

Q: When you were cooking in Camp, do you remember anything that happened?

A: There wasn't anything special. When I wasn't working, I went fishing in a river nearby.

Q: Did you think Japan would win the war?

A: There were all kinds of rumors. I didn't want Japan to lose but I didn't think they could win.

Q: Were there people in camp who thought Japan would win?

A: Yes, there were some.

Q: Did they demonstrate?

A: No, I didn't see any.

Q: I heard there were demonstrations in Tule Lake Center. Weren't there any in Poston?

A: No, we were interested in "Shigin" (Japanese poetry singing) and with our hobbies such as carving birds from wood.

Q: Were you in the center when Japan proclaimed defeat?

A: Yes, I was.

Q: How did you feel when you heard this?

A: I didn't think I could do anything about it.

Q: How did others feel?

A: We were all getting tired of camp life.

Q: Did you say that you were in Chicago about six months and then returned to Watsonville?

A: Yes. My wife and daughter worked in a tobacco pipe factory while we were in Chicago.

Q: What did you do after you returned to Watsonville?

A: We couldn't return to our house so I contracted a raspberry farm from a caucasian operator. Then I planted some strawberries there. It was a small place.

Q: What do you do when you contract a raspberry farm?

A: We take care of the raspberry plants and pick the berries when they ripen. We got half share of the yield.

Q: Was it hard work?

A: It wasn't too hard.

Q: Did your caucasian friends welcome you back?

A: Yes, they did. We have known them for a long time. Before the war, people from Denmark were better toward us than the people from Germany. After the war, the Germans were good toward us. They are intelligent people. I think sugar beet seeds originally came from Germany. Morning glory is a very bad weed. We had lots of them but there aren't many now because the Germans knew how to get rid of them.

Q: When was the hardest time in your life?

A: I think it was the time when we left the strawberry farm and

evacuated to Salinas Assembly Center.

Q: Did you have to leave your strawberry crop and etcs?

A: Yes, we had to leave the ripening strawberries.

Q: What was your loss?

A: I reported \$60,000.00 loss all totalled. The government did not compensate for all the loss.

Q: That was after the war was over, wasn't it?

A: Yes.

Q: When was your saddest time? Was it when you lost your son?

A: I was prepared for that. He told me not to grieve because he had done everything that he wanted to do.

Q: Can we let students and younger people listen to this tape?

A: I think it is alright.

Q: Can we have the right to use the material in this tape if we decide to publish a book?

A: Yes, it is alright.

Q: Will you please sign this authorization form and fill in the date?

A: I will sign it. Will you please fill in the date?

Rev. T.: Yes, and thank you very much for the interview.

"The end"

Translated by Y. Akawatsu